

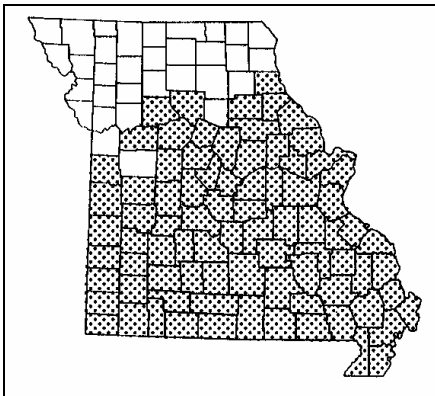
Sassafras

Sassafras albidum (Nutt.) Nees

Sassafras grows throughout the lower two-thirds of the state. A unique tree that is an invader of old fields and a pioneer along fencerows, it grows to a larger timber size on deep, rich moist soils in coves. On these better sites, it can exceed 2 feet in diameter and 60 feet in height.

The sapwood is creamy white to light yellow and heartwood is a pale or dull grayish brown or orange-brown. The bark is gray to dark brown, thick and deeply furrowed into large plates on older trees. On young trees, it is thin, gray to reddish brown, platy with a bright orange inner bark. The bright orange inner bark is an identifying feature. The grain pattern is somewhat similar to ash, though the wood is considerably softer. The odor of the oil of sassafras is apparent on freshly cut surfaces of the wood and bark, and the roots are harvested for commercial distillation of the oil of sassafras, which is used in tea, soap, perfumes, flavorings and medicines. The wood is moderately hard, easy to dry, machines well, and quite stable when dry. Growth rings are very distinct, the wood being ring porous. Tylosis in large pores is common and the wood is quite durable.

Common as a small tree, the large trees are usually so scattered or scarce that the species is never much of a factor in the lumber market. But to the cabinet maker, it is a beautiful and unique wood, filling a workshop with a sweet spicy smell as products such as paneling, furniture, novelties, toys and canoe paddles are created. In the Ozarks, if someone gives you a sassafras canoe paddle, you know this person respects you and is your friend. However, do not try to buy a sassafras paddle from a friend, as it can only be a special gift.



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